

ANIMAL MAGNETISM

AND

HYPNOTISM,

BY

L. H. STEINER, A. M., M. D.

From the Mercersburg Review, April 1861.

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Animal Magnetism and Hypnotism.

The student of science is rarely in a position to explain the real nature of a pseudo-science, when first brought before the public. He is as likely to ignore the truth which it contains, as to denounce the falsehoods which, superposed on the truth, constitute it charlatanry. Time is required to solve the mystery, and the next generation finds that a comparatively easy task, which had been a Herculean labor to its predecessor. In no pretended science has this been better demonstrated than in Animal Magnetism, or Mesmerism, as it was called after Antoine Mesmer—its founder. The cause of some of the phenomena, which could not be classed under the general head of deception, was not even suspected until decades of years had passed away. We are now put in a position, where it is somewhat easy to investigate these through the aids, with which modern science has supplied us. Figuier has presented us with an excellent resumé of all the facts in the history of Animal Magnetism, and we propose to avail ourselves freely of those in the few pages we shall devote to the subject. It becomes the medical profession never to shun an examination ; yet slow and careful deliberation must be employed before we give the result of such an examination, lest, in our haste, we may do irreparable injury to the cause of truth itself. *Festina lente* is a useful motto in scientific, as well as other pursuits.

Antoine Mesmer first appeared before the world, through the columns of a Danish journal, in a letter which obscurely set forth the doctrines that afterwards swelled up to the large proportions and gigantic pretensions of Animal Mag-

* Histoire du Merveilleux dans les temps modernes par Louis Figuier. Tome Troisième—La Magnétisme animal. Paris, 1860.

netism. He was then a resident of Vienna, but finding his sphere entirely too contracted, he removed, in the year 1778, to Paris, where all his most noted and notorious operations were carried on. In a short time public attention was directed to the pretended influences of the universal fluid, which he asserted was so subtle as to penetrate all bodies without losing any of its activity,—could be employed by the physician for provoking or directing crises in disease or for facilitating the action of remedies. With the view of attaining notoriety, which is equivalent to profit in the case of every quack, he approached the Academy of Sciences. But, although Le Roy, the president, seemed favorable to an examination, this was refused. The Royal Society of Medicine was then asked to examine into the nature of certain cures which he was producing, under the agency of this wonderful fluid, but Vicq-d'Azyr, the permanent secretary, informed him, that having no knowledge of the anterior condition of his patients, they could give no judgment on the subject.

Deslon—the physician in ordinary to the Count d'Artois—was attracted to Mesmer, and worked in company with him. Large apartments were selected for the treatment of the sick or those conceiving themselves sick. In order to accommodate the poor, as well as the rich, *a tree*, at the end of the Rue de Bondy, was specially charged with the fluid, and, around it, at all hours of the day might be seen crowds of persons, strong in faith, whatever might be said of their bodily infirmities. The number of the rich, demanding the attention of Mesmer, became so great that he conceived a special means of affecting crowds without the necessity of *manipulating* in each case, and this consisted in the *baquet*—a tub or bucket, containing a mixture of pounded glass and iron filings, on which were laid layers of bottles filled with water arranged as radii around a centre,—one layer having the necks turned outwards and the next vice versa;—the *baquet* was nearly filled with water. It was covered with a circular lid of oak, pierced with holes, through which protruded bent rods of glass or iron, one end termi-

nating in the water and the other pointed so that it could be applied to the part of the body affected. Around the baquet the parties undergoing treatment were seated, each holding his rod, and being loosely connected with the baquet by a cord. A more ridiculous scene cannot be conceived than this, especially when we imagine the arch-quack solemnly moving around the circle, clad in a lilac robe, manipulating some, touching others with his rod, and generally facilitating the operations of the fluid when it appeared slow and tedious. Figuier says, "mesmerism without the baquet would have been like nobility without armorial bearings, poetry without images, rhetoric without figures, diplomacy without protocols, geometry without axioms, medicine without a clinique, or religion without symbols." It was in fact the very flower and fruit of the new science.

The Faculty of Medicine taking the connection of Deslon—one of its members—with Mesmer, into consideration, suspended him for one year from its roll, with prospective expulsion if he should not disavow his published observations on animal magnetism. The Faculty, however, injured itself and benefitted Mesmer, by pronouncing him a charlatan and impostor without giving him, what he had asked, an examination. Deslon had been punished for associating with a charlatan, but the latter character was not proven upon Mesmer. In the next Spring, Mesmer announced his intention of leaving France, which was protested against not only by his infatuated patients, but even by Marie-Antoinette. The French government offered to constitute a commission for an examination of the subject, but on afterwards modifying the proposition, so as to dispense with the examination, but offering him an annuity of 20,000 livres, and 10,000 livres to pay for the rent of a house, in which he should instruct persons, three to be named by the government, in the principles of his discovery, Mesmer declined, with a number of ridiculous reasons for non-acceptance, and among these the fact that "he wanted territorial property rather than money."

After Mesmer had left Paris, Deslon acted the part of iatro-hierophant. At Mesmer's sessions, when his baquets were surrounded with anxious patients, the soothing sounds of the harmonica were used, Deslon employed the piano forte, and an orchestra at times executed expressive symphonies, or vocal music lent its aid to the general soothing influences of the magnetic saloon. The magnetic condition was marked with fits of laughter, yawnings, chills or sweats, "but, most often, with what was considered a happy symptom, motions and agitations of the intestines of a nature easy to understand, when we recollect that Mesmer almost always had taken care to administer to his patients a slightly laxative potion of cream of tartar." Females were the first who showed any additional effects of an influence on the nervous system; painful groans, floods of tears and frightful singultus, rattling respiration and hypocritical countenance suggestive of suffocation,—these were followed by convulsions. The most *endiablées* (the word is excellent, we dare not attempt its translation) were carried into a chamber provided with mattresses and cushions on the floor, and with wadded walls. Here they could indulge in all the fantastic movements of hysteria, without injuring themselves or disturbing others. We do not know enough of the secret history of this chamber to endorse it as the temple of Vesta, probabilities incline us to another opinion on the subject.

Mesmer, having returned to Paris, a subscription was raised to form a class, to whom he should impart instruction in his discovery. About this time he treated Court de Gébelin, and making a warm partizan of him, a species of masonic lodge was formed, called "*the Order of Harmony*," with its emblem, consisting of a burning altar, under a starry sky with the full moon, and the motto *omnia in pondere et mensurâ*.

The famous commission, of which Franklin, Le Roy, Bailly and others were members, was appointed by the king, March 12, 1784 to investigate the reality of the so-called magnetism. Inasmuch as this commission pre-

ferred to deal with Deslon rather than with Mesmer, the latter protested, but Bailly insisted upon it that the principles of the two were the same. Mesmer, then by a bold-stroke determined to push his opponents to the wall,—he published the names of the first hundred members of the Society of Harmony. These included La Fayette, Montesquieu, Noailles and others of the highest aristocratic circles. Their names were supposed sufficient to stamp mesmerism as certainly genteel, if not true, and, at the same time, to throw discredit upon Deslon and those who held with him. The latter, however, could boast the names of twenty one of the Faculty in the list of his élèves. This boast attracted the attention of the Faculty, who forthwith struck the names of such members from their roll, declaring that *compertum est M. Deslon et quosdam hujusce saluberrimi ordinis doctores, jurisjurandi ac virtutum quae medicum decet immemores, dedisse nomen novae et formidosae circulatorum militiae, quae facile credulos vanâ tuendae sanitatis spe, delusos mortales detinens, civium saluti, bonis moribus et fortunis, abstrusas molitur insidias.*

Bailly's report had to do with three things promised by Deslon, 1, to determine the existence of animal magnetism, 2, to communicate his knowledge of this subject, 3, to prove its utility in the cure of the sick. The first point was difficult to explain, since it must rest either on assertion or on an exhibition of its effects, the second would only be of service in showing that Deslon was an adept,—therefore, the third alone could engage the attention of the commission. The members soon became weary of the close examination required in investigating the pretended remedial influences, and they proceeded to examine more particularly the physical phenomena exhibited by those under mesmeric influence. The convulsions attracted their attentions, and they did not hesitate to say that there seemed some powerful influence affecting the sick, of which the magnetizer appeared to be the sole depository. They desired experiments should be made on themselves. Deslon himself acted as operator. "But although magne-

tism was energetic in its action on the multitude, it was calm and serene with the savants of the Academy and the Faculty."

At length it was determined to experiment at Passy on persons really sick ; most of them experienced no effect whatever. An effort being made to mesmerize Franklin, his secretary and his two nieces, proved also a failure. The Commission reported that, "feeling, imagination and imitation were the true causes of the effects attributed to this new agent known by the name of animal magnetism ; and that the use of the so-called magnetism must produce only injurious effects." This report, dated August 11, 1784, was followed by one from the Royal Society (Aug. 16, 1784). After the publication of the report, Mesmer's reputation began to decline, and in the course of 1785 he left Paris, visiting it again several times, during one of which visits he met Bailly on the way to his execution and courteously saluted him. The charlatan had lived his day,—the rest of his natural life was spent in luxurious obscurity, until March 15, 1815, when he died in Switzerland.

We have given, somewhat in detail, the history of Mesmer, and his connection with this pretended discovery. It is not possible within the limits of this article to dwell upon all the phases which animal magnetism assumed under its cultivators. In 1785, the Marquis de Puységur discovered artificial somnambulism, which revolutionized the whole practice of mesmerism. This became immensely popular with military men. "The descriptions given of the phenomena of this somnambulism abound in details absolutely incredible, and yet attested by thousands of honorable, disinterested witnesses." In 1787 Dr. Petetin of Lyons discovered how an artificial catalepsy could be produced by means of animal magnetism, the cause of which condition he considered due to an electric fluid which, proceeding from the brain, was directed by the par vagum towards the stomach and there exercised its effects. Eberhard Gmelin, the physiologist, inclined to the same opinion.

The subject having been brought before the Academy of Medicine again, through the experiments of Dupotet and others, a permanent Commission was appointed on the subject (Feb. 28, 1826), which prepared a report that was presented in June, 1831. This report, made by Husson and never either discussed or adopted by the Academy, admitted the existence of certain phenomena which could not be explained. It became "the pride and joy of the magnetizers." Six years afterwards, the Academy was obliged to undertake a re-examination of the subject, in consequence of attention having been directed to the painless performance of painful operations on persons under the mesmeric influence.

A Commission, consisting of Roux, Bouillaud, H. Cloquet, Pelletier, Dubois, Caventou and three others, was appointed to report upon certain facts which were alleged by Berna—a young mesmerizer—to occur in his practice. Their report was handed in, July 17, 1837, and was decidedly adverse to all the pretensions of Berna. This report brought out a paper from Husson, who felt that his credit was at stake, but the Academy adopted the report of the Commission, which had been written by Dubois. The disturbance, created at this time, induced Dr. Burdin, in September of the same year, to offer a prize of 3,000 francs to the somnambulist, who could read without the use of his eyes, of light or of touch. The Academy accepted the award of this prize, and Dubois, Double, Chomel, Husson, Louis, Gérardin and Moreau were appointed to superintend. But two persons accepted the challenge of Burdin, M. Pigéaire of Montpellier and Dr. Hublier. These failed to perform that which they promised. The failure was so complete that in 1840 Double recommended to the Academy of Medicine, "that it should abstain from bestowing any attention to the subject of Animal Magnetism, in the future, just as the Academy of Sciences refused to occupy itself with the quadrature of the circle and perpetual motion. This proposition was adopted by the Academy, * *

* and since the year 1840, when this edict of ostracism was

passed, the Academy has paid no attention to the subject, although that would not prove that it might not take it up to-morrow."

We do not care to present any details of the history of Mesmerism in England or the United States. They would not differ materially from those belonging to its history in France. Phenomena were frequently exhibited, which could not be explained as mere tricks, or the results of self-deception, and yet were not intelligible with the adoption of the theories presented by those who had attempted their investigation. In modern *hypnotism* we have similar phenomena, freed from mysterious surroundings, which may enable us to pilot our way through the stormy waters of mesmerism. "The same physiological data explain also a host of pretended supernatural events, which general history has handed down or the special history of prodigies has collected in the annals of science. It is easy to find among different peoples, various means of enchantment, fascination, &c., which may be considered as of the same nature as those provoked by *the nervous sleep*. The actions and heroes of modern thaumaturgy are thus despoiled of all their supernatural prestige. The state of extatic illumination of a crowd of individuals, and sometimes of entire populations, which formerly so gravely embarrassed scientific criticism, is no longer a great mystery; the marvellous vanishes from this dark territory when science plants a foot upon it."

Hypnotism was discovered by Dr. Braid of Manchester, in 1841. This word was employed to indicate the process by which a person is thrown into a somnambule sleep. It consists in holding a bright object, between the thumb and middle fingers of the left hand, from six to twelve inches before the eyes, above the forehead, so that the person will be compelled to make some slight exertion with the eyes in order to look at it. The attention must be solely directed to the object. At first the pupils contract, afterwards they dilate. After ten or fifteen seconds have elapsed, on raising the legs or arms gently, a disposition

will be perceived on the part of the patient, if he has been strongly affected, to retain them in the position they have been placed. Special sensations, such as that of warmth or cold, the muscular sense and certain of the mental faculties are at first greatly exalted, as is the case in alcoholic stimulation. This is followed by a depression greater than occurs in natural sleep; the special sensations may instantaneously disappear, and the muscles assume, on the one hand, the most tonic rigidity or extreme mobility. In order to remove the cataleptic condition, it is only necessary to direct a slight current of air upon the rigid organ.

Braid claimed to be able to perform operations on patients in this hypnotic state. Azam of Bordeaux had made experiments on patients to prove their insensibility to pain in this condition, but did not divulge the results obtained until 1859, when he communicated them to Broca of Paris. The latter immediately determined to employ Hypnotism in a surgical operation, with the view of testing this insensibility. The first operation was the opening of a very painful abscess, which was performed without any consciousness of the operation. Velpeau announced this to the Academy, Dec. 5, 1859, since which time, general attention has been given to it in France by physiologists. Further investigations have only shown that the abolition of sensibility is confined to the peripheral nerves, so that hypnotism will never supplant, as an anaesthetic agent, either ether or chloroform. Surgically considered, hypnotism has been a failure, but in a physiological point of view, it is of immense importance as a guide to the comprehension of mesmeric phenomena. It has proven the existence of such a state as nervous sleep.

Figuier presents some prominent facts which have attracted the attention of science, and which evidently are to be classed with those of Hypnotism. Prominent among these are the operations (261 in number) performed without pain by Dr. Esdaile in India, under what he claimed to be mesmerism. These were first published in 1852, and are undoubtedly cases of nervous sleep. The monks of Mount

Athos were said to throw themselves into protracted cataleptic extacies, simply by looking fixedly at the umbilicus. The fakirs of India accomplish the same result by looking at the tip of the nose, from which, they say, after a little while, a bluish flame proceeds, and then the cataleptic condition occurs. The Arabs exhibit similar phenomena, and Dr. Rossi—physician to Halem Pacha—says that hypnotism is employed by the Egyptian sorcerers to produce sleep and insensibility. In the French possessions in Africa, means of fascination are employed of a like character by the *Gzanes* Arabs, and the marabouts of some of the religious sects on the frontiers of Morocco. “On the palm of the hand is described, with some black coloring substance, a circle with a black point in the centre. By fixing the eyes attentively on this circle for a few minutes, they become fatigued and begin to twinkle and get obscured; soon the fatigue is followed by sleep with a species of insensibility.” Another method involves the patient’s gaze being directed to the light of a lamp behind a transparent bottle, filled with water. In the case of one with a nervous temperament, palpitations of the heart and cephalalgia may be induced.

The fascination which serpents are said to exercise on birds, &c., may possibly be explained in this way. Chickens can be hypnotized by placing them on a board, holding the bill on the same and then drawing a line in front of them, in the prolongation of the bill. This was known in the time of Kircher* and is mentioned in his *Ars magna lucidæ et umbræ* (1646). That, fixed gaze from man on almost all animals will render them quiet and at least for the time, gentle, is known to every one.

* Gallinam pedibus vinctam in pavimentum quodpiam deponere: quæ primo quidem se captivam sentiens, alarum succussione totiusque corporis motu, vincula sibi injecta excutere omnibus modis laborabit; sed irritò tandem conatu de evasione, veluti desperabunda, ad quietem se componens, victoris de arbitrio sistet. Quietâ igitur sic manente gallina, ab oculo ejusdem in ipso pâvimento lineam rectam cretâ vel alio quovis coloris genere quæ chordæ figuram referat, duces. Deinde eam compedibus solutam relinques. Dico quod gallina, quantumvis vinculis soluta, minime tamen avolutura sit, etiam si ad avolandum instimulaveris.

Having thus shown the fact that there is such a state as has been called nervous sleep, let us see how Figuier applies this by way of explanation to the mesmeric phenomena. The important point, in the employment of the *baquet* by Mesmer, was the distraction of the mind from all surrounding objects and disturbing thoughts; then the movements of the mesmerizer or the object on which the eyes were fixed, became the means of producing the hypnotic effect. Mesmer operated usually on natures that were extremely nervous, and the appearance of convulsions in one case, through the power of involuntary imitation or expectation, would ensure the appearance of similar convulsions in nearly all, especially when they were connected together by a common chord, which they believed to be a magnetic chain.

Should the question rise whether hypnotism would be sufficient to account for the violent nervous phenomena which required those affected to be carried into Mesmer's cushioned chamber, it can be met by the experience in the hospitals of Paris in 1860, where hypnotism produced attacks of most frightful hysteria, and experience taught the operators that it could not be considered an inoffensive amusement, in consequence of the congestion of the brain attending it being very dangerous in some patients. A case given by Gigot-Suard is, in this particular, very important. "A nervous young girl was hypnotized with a pair of scissors held a few inches above the root of her nose. In ten minutes her sleep was complete; as soon as the eyelids closed, she threw herself back in the easy chair, her feet projecting in the air. Her body became as a rigid rod. She did not utter cries, but veritable howls, which were from time to time, interrupted by incoherent words, such as *cemetery, death, phantom, &c.* She tore her face with her nails, requiring two to restrain her. The frenzy would change for fits of immoderate laughter, followed by tears, hiccoughs and new convulsions," &c. All these symptoms resulted from the use of a pair of scissors, held a few inches above the root of the nose. Surely Mesmer's most astounding phenomena were not more so than these.

Gigot-Suard has also found that it is not necessary to employ a brilliant object, that the contemplation of any object, in some cases, will produce the required effect. The Mesmerizers employ, instead of a brilliant object, the eyes of the operator;—the patient is generally seated on a chair somewhat lower than the operator, which results in a species of strabismus in addition to the ocular fatigue. The manipulations and other processes adopted by mesmerizers only accelerate the effect, by acting on the imagination and the nervous system.

A comparison of the physiological phenomena of the mesmeric and hypnotic conditions will be quite as striking and demonstrative of their identity, as that of the means of producing these conditions has been. The following are common results produced in good somnambules by mesmerizers: “1, insensibility of the periphery of the body; 2, muscular rigidity proceeding, in some cases, to catalepsy, or in, others to marked relaxation of all the muscles; 3, exaltation of the principal senses; 4, exaltation of the intelligence.” Now the three first results are common with individuals in the hypnotized state,—the two first, indeed, furnish the proof of the existence of this state, and the third—hyperaesthesia—is thus mentioned by Azam: “Hypnotic hyperaesthesia affects all the senses, except sight, but it is specially manifested in the sensation of temperature and in the muscular sense, the existence of which it demonstrates in an irrefragable manner. The hearing becomes so acute that a conversation can be heard in a lower story; the subjects become very much fatigued by this acuteness; their countenances express the pain, which, the noise of vehicles or that of the voice, gives them; the sound of a watch is heard at twenty-five feet distance. The sense of smell is developed and acquires the acuteness possessed by animals. The patients draw back with disgust from odors that no one else perceives. If one has used ether, or made an autopsy three or four days before, he cannot deceive these patients. * * * The muscular sense acquires such delicacy, that I have seen repeated

before me the strange things which are related of spontaneous somnambulism, and of many of the so-called magnetic subjects. I have seen them writing very correctly, when a large book was held between the eyes and the paper, or threading a very fine needle under the same circumstances, and walk into an apartment with their eyes absolutely closed and bandaged,—all these without any other real guide than the resistance of the air and the perfect precision of movements guided by the hyperaesthetic muscular sense.”

In the condition attained by the magnetic somnambule, it is alleged that peculiar powers of knowing the thoughts are possessed. It is difficult to argue on this point, because - so difficult to get at the real truth in the testimony adduced. It is impossible that an individual can enjoy, in such a condition, privileges which are foreign to human nature. This is admitted from past experience and by our reason. The burden of proof lies on the other side. “But the exaltation, the remarkable development that the principal senses attain in this physiological condition, and the not less striking exaltation of the intellectual faculties (which undoubtedly results from this same transient activity of the principal senses) render the individual capable of many acts and thoughts which are interdicted in the normal state. He can reflect, compare, recollect better than when in a waking condition ; but he can not exceed the limits of his faculties or of the knowledge previously received. He deceives himself every time he wishes to depart from the sphere that nature assigns our faculties. * * * The transient excitation of the senses of the magnetic somnambule will explain then, according to our opinion, the phenomena which magnetisers have called *suggestion*, or *penetration of thought*. When a magnetizer declares that his somnambule will obey an order mentally expressed by himself, and when the somnambule, which is, however, somewhat rare, accomplishes this *tour de force*, it is not impossible to explain the apparent miracle, which, if it were real, would reverse all the notions of physiology and, we might say, all the known laws of animate nature. In this case,

a noise, a sound, a gesture, any sign whatever, an impression inappreciable to all the assistants, is sufficient to the somnambule, in the extraordinary condition of tension of his principal senses, to make him understand, without any supernatural aid, the thought which the magnetizer wishes to communicate."

Although the facts thus elicited enable us to recognize the identity, or at least the close relationship, of Mesmerism and Hypnotism, and to refer them both to a physiological condition, still the explanation of this physiological condition is wanted. Honest study may now furnish us results which could not have been attained in the last century when Mesmer first attracted attention by his singular phenomena. Physiology and Psychology must go hand in hand in the investigation. So long as the facts were mixed with charlatanry, it was difficult to attract the attention of the students of either science to this investigation. What is the physiological condition under which these phenomena are produced? The terms, *magnetic somnambulism*, *nervous sleep*, *hypnotic state* are only names, but they indicate a condition, the producing cause of which is as certainly open to study as its effects.

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